

Air Traffic Controllers Make Oshkosh a Big Success

Aug. 3 - Some of the nation's top air traffic controllers came together in Oshkosh, Wis., last week to make one of the world's biggest aviation events a huge success.

“The controllers make it work,” said Wanda Adelman, who has been the air traffic manager at Oshkosh Tower for the last three years. In many ways, working at the Oshkosh Air show is a labor of love for the air traffic professionals. “They love dealing with the traffic, and just love Oshkosh,” said Adelman.

The controllers had plenty of traffic to deal with. One day during this year's event the traffic at the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture — the air show's official name — surpassed a normal day's volume at Chicago O'Hare, and in just 11 working hours. We were “slamming busy,” said Adelman. The week-long event saw 10,000 aircraft arrive at the Wisconsin town.

Such challenges at the Oshkosh event attract some of the ‘best and brightest’ air traffic controllers from around the country. The air show organizers carefully select 64 controllers and 10 supervisors. The intense heat presented an additional challenge this year, especially for controllers stationed on the ground.

Oshkosh uses special — and somewhat unusual — air traffic procedures to ensure safe, coordinated operations. Given the sheer volume of traffic, pilots were not allowed to respond verbally to the tower, and instead used ‘wing rocks’ to acknowledge instruction. The FAA also gives Oshkosh permission to reduce the official minimum separation distances between aircraft.

The controllers were split into 16 teams of four, with three teams assigned to the main tower on a rotating basis. Each team included two veteran controllers with a minimum of three years of experience at Oshkosh, one controller with more limited

experience, and one ‘rookie.’ Two team members acted as ‘spotters,’ another was the main communicator, and the fourth acted as the team leader. The arrangement is completely different from what controllers usually experience, Adelman explained.

Despite the controllers' disparate origins, they quickly bonded into teams and worked well together, Adelman noted. “That concept makes Oshkosh work,” she stressed.

FAA Administrator Marion Blakey witnessed the work being done by the controllers first-hand when she visited the Oshkosh Tower when it was in full swing this year. That was “really nice,” said Adelman.

While Oshkosh arrivals were cleared from the tower, departures were cleared directly from the runway by controllers stationed on mobile platforms. The platforms were equipped with a communications console that provided instant contact with the tower and each other. The so-called MOOCOWs, or Mobile Operating and Communications Workstations, get their quirky name from Wisconsin's dairy industry. “The controllers love to go out on the runway. They see it all up close and personal,” said Adelman.

About seven miles southwest of the airfield is the Fisk approach control facility for Oshkosh. Here controllers used binoculars to line up aircraft for approach and landing at the air show. Controllers say “how goes Fisk, goes Oshkosh,” noted Adelman. She praised Ray Thyfault, who took leave from his usual job as a controller in Kalamazoo, Mich., to be in charge of the approach control facility for the week.

For more information please visit
ATO Online at www.ato.faa.gov.



Photo: FAA

WING WALKER An aerial stunt artist performs at the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture in Oshkosh, Wis.

Western Terminal Service Area Hailed for Error-Free July

Aug. 2 - In what is being hailed as a major achievement, Western Area Terminal Operations worked through the entire month of July without recording a Category A or B operational error.

“Credit needs to be recognized,” said Ron Beckerdite, manager for Western Service Center Safety Assurance Group, who highlighted “the performance by facilities and the good work by controllers.” In comparison, the Western Service Area —

which includes terminal facilities across the western third of the country — had nine Category B operational errors in July 2005. This improvement shows “a lot of effort by a lot of people,” added Beckerdite from Seattle.

The last time Western Area Terminal Operations recorded an A or B air traffic operational error — the most serious — was way back on June 30.

“It was great to learn of this record set in the most critical area of operational er-

Chew Points Aero Club Toward Future of Aviation

Aug. 7 - The ATO continues to make progress in reinventing itself to deal with the enormous challenges facing the aviation industry, Chief Operating Officer Russ Chew told the Aero Club of Washington last Thursday.

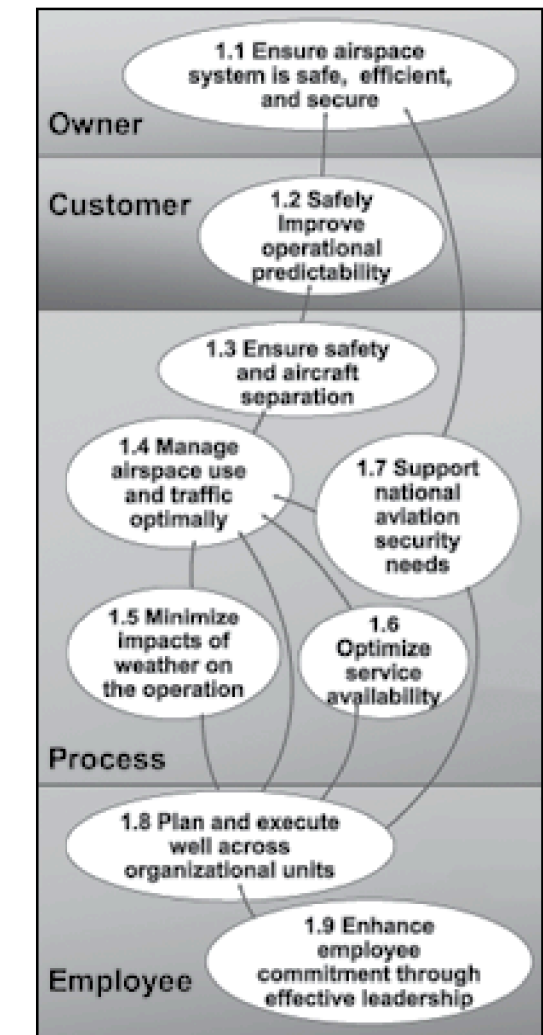
Addressing the assembled airline executives, general aviation leaders and government officials, Chew took the opportunity to discuss many of the advances made by the ATO since its creation more than two years ago.

“Once again we are facing increasing congestion, but there is an important difference,” he said. “The ATO has been preparing itself for the expanding industry and for the coming surge in demand.”

He told the 200 attendees at the Aero Club luncheon that creating a system to handle the air traffic demand of the future is not simply about buying new technology. “It's about creating an organization that can execute a strategy that actually leads to transforming the air traffic system,” he explained.

ATO Strategy Map

Achieve Operational Excellence



operational errors because of thunderstorms, flight deviations and higher traffic volume.

Typically July, August and September are the worst three months of the year for operational errors, pointed out Howard Burnette, a quality assurance specialist for the Air Traffic Organization's Terminal Services. “They did a good job and should be recognized,” he said.

rors,” said FAA Administrator Marion Blakey. “The Western Service Area has set a very high benchmark, but I hope and expect other regions will be able to match it as well. Overall our record on operational errors continues to move in the right direction. It is an area of utmost importance for us.”

The timing of the Category A/B error-free month made it even more remarkable. It came in the middle of the summer travel season, which usually sees an increase in